Election Procedures

General Election November 3, 2020

Election Preparation

Certification of candidates and issues

Any candidate or issue that is to appear on a ballot must have paperwork filed with the County Clerk and Recorder or Secretary of State, depending on the office that is being sought. This includes a petition that must be signed by a certain number of eligible voters to qualify the candidate for participation in the election. Petitions may also be circulated to place special issues on the ballot.

All submitted signatures must be verified against the Colorado voter registration database (SCORE). If enough signatures are verified to qualify the candidate or issue for an election, the petition is deemed "sufficient" and the candidate/issue is referred to the ballot.

Software programming

Critical election information is input into various software programs. First, the specifics of the election—including offices up for election, candidates for those offices, office boundaries, and eligible electors—are programmed into the SCORE system. This system is used by all Colorado counties to maintain a single list of Colorado's registered voters as well as to assist in administering elections.

The County Clerk then downloads the information contained in SCORE and securely transfers it to our voting software vendor. Our vendor then lays out the design of the ballot.

The vendor then sends the election database and PDF ballots to the County Clerk. The Clerk takes these files and imports them into the ballot tallying software program called ICC, or Image Cast Central. This program will then produce a single cumulative tally.

Ballot design

The content of the ballot (which races appear and the order in which they appear) is dictated by federal, state, and local laws.

Ballot design is the layout of the ballot content and is dependent upon the judgment of the local election office running the election. For enhanced clarity and simplicity, Chaffee County uses best practices established at the national level by experts in ballot readability.

Proper ballot design also involves accurate proofing of the content for each ballot style. Chaffee County has 9 precincts and many other local government jurisdictions participate in the General Election which leads us to have as many as 28 different ballot styles that must be proofed before ballot production can begin.

In addition to the design of paper ballots, electronic ballots must also be designed, produced and proofed to be used on electronic voting machines. Electronic voting machines also contain audio ballots that must be recorded onto the machines.

Equipment testing

Prior to and after every election, the equipment used to record, tabulate, and report votes must be tested according to state laws and regulations.

The Hardware Diagnostic test is performed to verify that mechanical components of each electronic voting device are working correctly. After the successful completion of the test for each device, the devices are sealed. Documentation of the sealed information and all testing records for each device are maintained by the County Clerk's Office.

The Logic and Accuracy Test is a documented review of the Election Office's ability to produce accurate results of voter choices. It is performed by staff and an appointed testing board consisting of at least one representative from each major political party, and it is open to the public and media.

For this test, staff and the testing board prepare test decks of ballots that includes every ballot style and a voted position for every candidate on every race, including write-in candidates, overvotes, and undervotes. This deck is run through the high speed ballot scanners, and results are compared to a hand tally. The testing board signs a Public Logic and Accuracy Testing Certification document verifying that all required testing was completed in a satisfactory manner.

After Election Day, a post-election audit takes place when the Secretary of State randomly selects which election machinery is to be audited. The machinery selected includes five percent of the ballot marking devices and the high speed ballot scanners. A report is generated, and the ballots are hand-tallied and compared to the report.

Ballot production, tracking, and delivery

Ballot production

Production includes both the printing of ballots and the insertion of those ballots into mail ballot packets. Ballots are printed using strict requirements from the Clerk's Office, such as proper paper weight and registration of the ballot image on the paper. With such strict requirements, only certain certified printers are able to produce ballots.

Once printed, ballots are inserted into a generic ballot packet, then the individual voter's name and barcode are imprinted onto the outside envelope. This process is complex and requires precise use of computer generated databases and insertion machinery, as every voter must be sent a ballot that corresponds to their correct precinct and ballot style.

BallotTrax

The Chaffee County Elections Office offers BallotTrax as a service so voters can track their mail ballot from when it is printed to when it has been accepted and counted. Voters can choose to receive notifications by phone, email, or text message about the status of their ballot.

Ballot delivery to USPS

Chaffee County Elections sends ballots to voters through the United States Postal Service. Ballots are dropped at the Post Office between 22 and 18 days before Election Day and are automatically sent to all voters designated by Colorado election law as "active" voters.

Once printed, ballots are packaged in trays and on pallets. The pallets of ballots are securely delivered to the General Mail Facility. The mail ballots are scanned into the post office's mail tracking system and sorted into routes for delivery to Chaffee voters.

During the Election

Ballots to voters

Ballots are delivered to voters via USPS carriers. Voters are encouraged to visit **GoVoteColorado.gov** to make sure their address is current. The deadline to make changes to a voter record and have a ballot delivered by mail is eight days before Election Day. After that, a voter may visit any Voter Service and Polling Center to vote in person or obtain a mail ballot.

Return of ballots to the County Clerk's Office

Voted ballots may be returned through USPS or any other delivery service a voter might choose. To return a voted ballot by mail, the voter should affix the correct amount of postage. However, the Chaffee County Clerk's Office will not refuse ballots that do not have the proper postage affixed. Once the post office receives a voted ballot, it is scanned into the USPS mail tracking system and held for pick-up from staff or election officials.

Alternatively, a voter may return a ballot by dropping it off in person or having another person deliver it for them to any ballot drop-off location or Voter Service and Polling Center (VSPC). The Chaffee County Clerk's office has two (2) 24-hour ballot drop-off boxes available, one in Buena Vista and one in Salida. Colorado law restricts any one person from dropping off more than 10 ballots in an election. Voting site locations can be found by visiting ChaffeeClerk.Colorado.gov.

All voted ballots must be in the possession of the County Clerk's Office by 7 p.m. on Election Day in order to be counted.

VSPC operations

Voter Service and Polling Centers (VSPCs) are opened 8-15 days prior to Election Day depending on the type of election. Services include:

- Replacement ballots
- In-person paper and in-person accessible machine voting
- Ability to make an address change
- Ability to register to vote
- Return a voted mail ballot

Ballot Processing

All activities in ballot processing rooms can be witnessed by the public. For security, all rooms are video-monitored 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Every election worker in ballot processing rooms must wear an identification badge with party affiliation.

Ballot Receiving

Mail ballots are delivered to the County Clerk's Office by Election Officials picking ballots up from the USPS and 24/7 ballot boxes.

In this room, ballots in their envelopes are sorted into mail trays then run through a ballot sorting machine. The ballot sorter date stamps each envelope; batches the envelopes in groups of 25; captures the signature on back of envelope which is then used for signature verification; compares the barcode on the envelope to data from the voter registration database.

Data from the sorter is then loaded into SCORE and voters who have signed up for BallotTrax will receive a notification that the Clerk's Office has received their ballot. Voters can also log into GoVoteColorado.gov and see that their ballot has been received. Batched ballots in their envelopes are stored in mail trays until they have gone through signature verification.

The Ballot Receiving Room is secure and monitored by a camera 24/7.
Out-of-county ballots are time-stamped and sent to the appropriate county.

Verification

Signature Verification Judges work as a bi-partisan team. They go through a training where they learn techniques from a Certified Document Examiner and proper procedures from the Secretary of State's Office with regard to the law and rules.

Judges log into the ballot sorting machine through a static IP address. They review every signature on the ballot envelopes comparing them to signatures that are saved in the voters record.

If the signature matches, the ballot is accepted and the voter's record is updated to show that their ballot was verified. If the signature does not match, the bi-partisan team reviews all of the signatures in the voter's record to see if they match. Voters with rejected ballots due to non-matching or missing signatures are sent a Signature Affidavit Form and must also submit a copy of acceptable identification.

Accepted ballots are sent to the Ballot Preparation Room.

Preparation

In this room, batches of ballot envelopes are opened and ballots in their secrecy sleeves are removed. Envelopes are set aside and the ballots are removed from the secrecy sleeves and flattened out. The ballots are counted again, the quantity logged, and the ballots are placed into a transfer case.

Counting and adjudication

Ballots are run through the high speed scanner and quantities are checked. A unique number is imprinted onto every ballot which denotes the tabulator number, batch number, sequence number, time and date.

The scanners read the marks on the ballots that indicate a voter's choice for candidates and issues, then pass the results to a tabulation computer. Ballots that are successfully scanned are sealed in a ballot transfer case and are sent to the Ballot Storage Room where they will remain for 25 months before being destroyed.

In the rare instance that a scanner cannot read a damaged ballot, a bipartisan ballot resolution team examines the ballot and sends it to the ballot duplication team, who examines the damaged ballot to determine voter intent, then correctly makes a duplicate by marking a blank ballot. The teams keep a journal with important information about each ballot that is duplicated. All original and duplicated ballots are numbered the same so that they can be identified at a later time if necessary. Duplicated ballots are returned to the Ballot Counting Room. The damaged ballots are sealed in a ballot transfer case and sent to the Ballot Storage Room.

If a ballot has improper marks, over/under votes, or the voter intent is not clear, then the ballot is sent electronically to an adjudication team, a bipartisan team of two election judges that review the ballot and determine voter intent based on a Voter Intent Guide provided by the Secretary of State. The team marks the ballot digitally and a log of their decisions is attached to the ballot.

Tabulation

Ballot tabulation takes place on a tabulation computer located in the Ballot Counting Room. Tabulation is accomplished by collecting scanned vote results from the high speed ballot scanner and paper ballots from ballot marking devices. The results are sent to the ballot tabulation computer through an isolated secure network that has no ties to any other network or the internet.

The computer collects and compiles all results using Results Tally Reporting (RTR). From this system, results are printed and downloaded to a secure external drive so that they can be uploaded to the County Clerk's website and the Secretary of State's Election Night Recording site.

Results and Certification

Publication of unofficial results

On Election Night, unofficial election results are posted on the Secretary of State's Election Night Reporting (ENR) site beginning at 7 p.m. and are updated every 1.5 hours until counting is completed. When available, the ENR link can be found on the County Clerk's website, **ChaffeeClerk.Colorado.gov.**

Post-election activities

After Election Day, various post-election activities occur prior to the official canvass of election and certification of results. These include: processing provisional ballots, reconciling forms used at Voter Service and Polling Centers, sending and receiving signature discrepancy letters, sending and receiving identification letters, assisting voters who come to the office to sign their ballots, and processing ballots received within eight days of the election from overseas electors.

Risk-limiting audit

A risk-limiting audit uses statistical analysis to allow election officials to review a few of all ballots cast in an election to double-check outcomes. Risk-limiting audits are required for all Colorado elections. These audits use a random number seed and a computer algorithm to select random ballots to check against tabulation software results. This ensures strong statistical confidence in election outcomes.

Canvass of election and certification of results

The canvass of an election is the process by which the unofficial results are thoroughly examined and certified. The canvass is conducted by the Chaffee Canvass Board, which consists of one or more appointees from the two major political parties and the Chaffee County Clerk and Recorder or designee. The Canvass Board reconciles the ballots cast in an election to confirm that the number of ballots counted in that election does not exceed the number of ballots cast in that election. The board also reconciles the ballots cast in each precinct to confirm that the number of ballots cast does not exceed the number of registered electors in the precinct.

The Canvass Board inspects documents that have been produced by the Elections Office and presented to the board during a meeting conducted approximately two weeks after the election. However, the Canvass Board can examine any election documents it desires and may be present to inspect any pre- or post-election activities.

No later than the thirteenth day after a primary election or the seventeenth day after any other election, the Canvass Board certifies the abstract of votes cast and transmits the certification of election results to the Secretary of State and any other political subdivisions involved in the election.